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SUBJECT: A PRO-VELAYATI CONSERVATIVE DISCUSSES IRANIAN POLITICS

REF: IRPO DUBAI 0012

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CLASSIFIED BY: Jillian L. Burns, Director, Iran Regional
Presence Office, Dubai, UAE.
REASON: 1.4 (d)

1.(S/NF) Summary: In a conversation that predated passage of UNSCR 1747, an Iranian doctor with reportedly close connections to conservative circles discussed Iran's nuclear issue and the domestic political situation. He predicted Iran would eventually cave to international pressure and suspend enrichment, but he clearly felt Iran was entitled to nuclear weapons to protect itself from a perceived nuclear threat from Israel. The principal focus of his political remarks was extolling the positive influence of former Foreign Minister Velayati, who he maintained wanted to build bridges with the West. While he did not in any way seek a "channel" between Velayati and the US, at one point he solicited USG financial backing for Velayati's next campaign run, a subject IRPO did not pursue. We hear multiple views concerning who has the ear of the Supreme Leader, so this report should not be considered definitive by any means, but the source offered some noteworthy views regarding politics in Iran. End summary

2.(S/NF) An Iranian doctor reportedly well connected to conservative circles discussed Iran's nuclear dilemma and domestic politics with IRPO Director in mid-March. (He called the Supreme Leader a former patient but said he could not help his undefined problem with his arm, and said his current patients include the Supreme Leader's son and the governor of the province of Tehran, but did not say for what.) He discussed a number of issues, including the nuclear issue, domestic politics, IRGC, Basij, and Ansar-e Hizballah (reftel). His views on regional politics, as well as on drug abuse in Iran (he also runs a drug addiction clinic), will be reported septel.

His view: Iran will accept suspension

3.(S/NF) In a conversation prior to passage of UNSCR 1747, the doctor predicted Iran will accept the enrichment suspension requirement (no time frame given), because pressure from sanctions will leave it no choice. Nonetheless, he was very critical of what he saw as the US acting as the "arbitrator" of who can have nuclear technology and who cannot. It was clear he

believed that Iran's goal was to build nuclear weapons. Given that he claimed "all" Iranians believe Israel would use nuclear weapons against Iran as a first strike, he appeared to feel Iran was justified in arming itself.

4.(S/NF) What troubled the doctor most was the notion that President Ahmadi-Nejad -- whom he does not support -- would reap the political benefits from any subsequent improvement of relations with the West should Iran suspend enrichment and enter into negotiations. Rehashing the old argument from Iranians over who gets credit for any rapprochement with the US, he claimed Ahmadi-Nejad's principal goal at this point is to get reelected in 2009 and that he needed to do something to reverse his sinking popularity.

5.(S/NF) In contrast to the doctor's views, several other sources seemed to think Iran would need more incentives to suspend. One source suggested allowing Iran to ask for a reciprocal precondition for talks, such as US first unfreezing Iran's assets. Another source suggested Iranians could announce they have reached a percentage of enrichment which would be "acceptable" to West, then say they are stopping activity because their factories are "not ready." Another claimed that Iran would trust the UK more than it would trust Russia to do enrichment for them.

His view: Velayati for president

6.(S/NF) The doctor acknowledged, however, that the call on whether or not to suspend enrichment was not the president's, but ultimately the Supreme Leader's. He further claimed that Ali Velayati, foreign minister under President Rafsanjani, was the most influential voice on the Supreme Leader's foreign policy committee. (Note: this is a reference to the Strategic Council for Foreign Relations, created by the Supreme Leader in June 2006 to act as an advisory panel on foreign relations. It is not clear how influential this body has been in foreign policy decision-making. Endnote) The doctor maintained that

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Ahmadi-Nejad has no voice on this committee.

7.(S/NF) The doctor, clearly a fan of Velayati, reportedly served on former FM Velayati's failed 2005 presidential campaign. He said Velayati plans to run again in 2009, and he plans to join his campaign again. The doctor claimed Velayati's star is rising in Iran, along with Tehran Mayor Qalibaf. He thought Velayati made a mistake in pulling out of the 2005 election.

8.(S/NF) He claimed that Rafsanjani will not run for president again in 2009 and has already lent his support to Velayati. He maintained that Velayati had the confidence of both the Supreme Leader and Rafsanjani and that the Supreme Leader knew that any advice from Velayati already had Rafsanjani's support. The doctor said that Velayati shares foreign policy goals with Rafsanjani and that he wants to establish ties with the rest of world. On the other hand, he indicated differences between the two on domestic policy but did not elaborate. (Note: He also claimed that Velayati, numerous others in politics today, and himself were members of the Hojjiyeh prior to the revolution, which he called the "pure" resistance to the Shah. However, he said both he and Velayati, as well as many others, had since left the group. Endnote)

Takes money to win an election

9.(S/NF) The doctor accused Ahmadi-Nejad of misusing large amounts of Tehran municipal funds to buy votes during the election, such as \$120 "loans" to Basij members. He also accused current Tehran Mayor Qalibaf of corrupt practices in the election, saying he used money for his campaign that police received (not clear whether legitimately or illegitimately) for resolving problems people had with importing goods into Iran.

10.(S/NF) In what was otherwise a normal conversation with a new contact, at one point the doctor changed tacks and said the US should help pave the way for better relations by playing a role in deciding who wins the 2009 elections. He said that it will take money to win the elections, and Velayati needs some. He gave IRPO Director the business card of a company he said was a trading company he set up to raise funds for Velayati's campaign. He suggested that the US allow this trading company to import goods normally blocked by sanctions to allow Velayati to start compiling funds. IRPO Director did not pursue the matter. When asked why Velayati would not have access to Rafsanjani's reported immense wealth if Rafsanjani was backing him, the doctor responded that Rafsanjani was under such scrutiny for corruption these days from Ahmadi-Nejad, who "hated" him, he could not risk it. The doctor also maintained that the Iranian diaspora did not contribute money for Iranian political campaigns.

His view: Ahmadi-Nejad made many mistakes

11.(S/NF) Despite his argument about the importance of financial backing to win the presidency, the doctor underscored the Supreme Leader's role in influencing elections. He claimed that after Khatami twice won the presidential election, the Supreme Leader decided to ensure future winners had his pre-approval. For this reason, he mobilized the IRGC and the Basij in the 2005 presidential elections, but, said the doctor, the results backfired on him. Khomeini did not realize how much influence others, particularly Ayatollah Mesbah-Yazdi, would have on Ahmadi-Nejad. The doctor was very critical of Ahmadi-Nejad, who he said made many mistakes in his first six months, including listening to Mesbah-Yazdi. He said President Ahmadi-Nejad's popularity is now on the decline but that the Supreme Leader will not drop him as president.

Rumor mill

12.(S/NF) Another source, an Iranian-American who travels frequently to Iran, said he heard rumors in Iran that 150 MPs were prepared to impeach Ahmadi-Nejad, but the Supreme Leader told them not to because Khomeini knows he is dying. Another source maintained that the Supreme Leader is worried that if he dies and Ahmadi-Nejad is impeached, the Islamic system will fall. In the meantime, the Supreme Leader is reportedly trying to select his own replacement. One source maintained that

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Rafsanjani is proposing former President Khatami, but supposedly only because he knows the Supreme Leader will say no and then maybe consider Rafsanjani. Ayatollah Mesbah-Yazdi is reportedly proposing Judiciary chief Shahrudi, while others are advocating replacing the position of supreme leader with a council. One rumor is that the Supreme Leader is refusing chemotherapy to hide visible signs of his illness. (Note: It is important to note how rumor-prone Iran is. End note)

13.(S/NF) Comment: Another contact, a purported former IRGC general, was dismissive of Velayati's influence on foreign policy and claimed that Hassan Rohani, formerly Iran's top nuclear negotiator and now the Supreme Leader's representative on the Supreme National Security Council, has a stronger voice. We often hear different prognoses from different Iranians as to who is the ascendant power. Some Iranians have predicted that Qalibaf or Larijani will be the next president; this is the first time we have heard the prediction for Velayati. We would also note that while we frequently hear claims that Rafsanjani is a pragmatist seeking closer ties with the West, we hear this less said about Velayati. In any case, all Iranian prominent figures seem to be towing the party line in statements surrounding passage of UNSCR 1747, with none right now arguing for rapprochement over enrichment. Velayati called the UNSC's intervention in Iran's nuclear case illegal and said that Iran will not suspend uranium enrichment even for a short period of

time. He said that putting up with international pressure was the high price the country was to pay for materializing great projects such as development of nuclear energy. He called access to the nuclear fuel cycle the redline of the ruling system on the nuclear issue. "Iran will not withdraw from this redline but will rather use various political, international and economic levers to reduce the inevitable cost," he added. We were surprised by the request for USG funding for Velayati, and it discredited the contact to a degree, although the rest of his comments seemed genuine. The goal of such an inquiry may have been just to test the reaction, or it may have demonstrated our interlocutor's ignorance of US policy, despite having lived in the US 15 years. It may also have been simply an attempt at personal gain.

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